United Nations A/S-23/PV.4

General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

4th meeting
Tuesday, 6 June 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The Acting President: I call on Mrs. Yvonne Ravales-Resida, Minister for Regional Affairs and Minister of Justice and Police of Suriname.

Mrs. Ravales-Resida (Suriname): The Government of Suriname salutes the President of the General Assembly and is pleased to see him presiding over this historic review conference. We are convinced that his leadership will guarantee us a successful outcome.

We also take great pride in participating in this gathering, since it gives us an opportunity to reflect on the manner in which Suriname has kept its promises with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

In formulating our national report on the review of this programme, we had the opportunity to evaluate our achievements, to consider the obstacles and shortcomings and to look ahead to a future course of action in order to be able to honour the commitments we made five years ago.

Due to the increased economic and financial vulnerability of our commodity-based small economy, the Government of Suriname was forced to reduce its spending, including expenditure related to the social sectors, which had a negative impact on women and children. This was compounded by new trends in international cooperation, shaped by globalization, the emergence of trade blocs, the perils of trade liberalization and the diversion of resources to only a few countries and regions. Despite these constraints, Suriname has succeeded in implementing projects in almost all the areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, including strengthening its partnership with national and international funding agencies and national non-governmental organizations, as well as the United Nations agencies, all of which have contributed to the implementation of projects for the advancement of women.

We are also participating in the Inter-American Commission of Women/Organization of American States regional action plan, as well as the regional action plans of the Caribbean Community and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and there is an agreement with the Dutch-speaking Caribbean — Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles — on gender issues.

Since 1999 our National Gender Bureau has carried out, in partnership with the United Nations

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Development Fund for Women, a programme entitled Women and Sustainable Human Development, with a view to promoting leadership, economic empowerment and human rights for women. Furthermore, the staff of the National Gender Bureau was increased, and we have made and are still making a strong and sustainable link to non-governmental organizations by establishing networks and are at present in the process of setting up a database and taking concrete steps towards gender mainstreaming.

In the field of women and leadership, we have striven to nominate women for, and place them in, leadership positions in all sectors — of course, not without some obstacles. In the previous five years we have nominated for the first time women for the positions of Speaker of Parliament, Minister of Justice and Police, Judge and Attorney-General, while the number of women in Parliament has increased.

In the field of health, the Government of Suriname has mandated a non-governmental organization to explicitly deal with the promotion and implementation of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women.

In the area of poverty eradication, various community development projects were carried out with assistance from major donors, such as the European Union, the Netherlands, the Inter-American Development Bank and various United Nations agencies, of which women and children are beneficiaries.

The Canada-Caribbean Gender Equity Fund and ECLAC also assisted us in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. With their support, gender mainstreaming within the public sector was started and has already yielded results. Due to this awareness, the Convention of Belém do Pará, on the elimination of violence against women, is only one step away from being ratified by our National Assembly, and the first report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been drafted.

Suriname is in the process of formulating its first National Gender Plan, to which Government institutions and some 100 non-governmental organizations have contributed through participation in various workshops. The methodology which has been used was based on the questionnaire of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the indicators of ECLAC. This first Gender Plan will be submitted to the Government for approval.

Furthermore, a translation into our national language of the Beijing Platform for Action has been distributed to all libraries and Government institutions, including the libraries of non-governmental organizations. Information on gender issues is becoming known through a monthly page in the local daily and in the Government *Gender Bulletin*, which is funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Suriname is implementing a programme on the decentralization and strengthening of local government in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank. We can assure the Assembly that the process of gender mainstreaming will continue with the decentralization of gender training to local districts, through public education, radio programmes in local languages, television programmes and empowerment projects for grass-roots women and men. This empowerment programme is based on the sustainable livelihood approach of the United Nations Development Programme. In this respect the Government furthermore acknowledges the important role of the private sector and of non-governmental organizations as partners in gender mainstreaming.

In our efforts to achieve gender equality, my Government holds the view that it is essential for men and women to become equal partners in the process of sustainable development, gender mainstreaming and securing peace. Gender mainstreaming should not be a process only within the public sector, but also at the level of the funding agencies and financial institutions, which can play a critical role in supporting Governments in their efforts to integrate gender concerns into policy identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In closing, my Government reaffirms its commitment to the further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and is pleased to be part of the global consensus on the future course of action for the advancement of women in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Christine Bergmann, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of Germany.

Ms. Bergmann (Germany): First of all, I would like to associate myself with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

The global conferences prior to Beijing had focused on equal opportunity for women and men and actively pursued its advancement. The Fourth World Conference on Women, however, was able to light a flame for the implementation of equal opportunity, a flame which continues to burn conspicuously all around the world. It is now up to us all to keep that flame alight and to prevent it from dying out or from being extinguished on purpose.

This is crucial, since the achievement of equality between women and men is an irreversible process, even when in some cases progress seems to take place at a snail's pace. Women's rights are human rights. The most recent achievement on this path has been the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Our aim must be to have that Protocol signed by all countries. Germany will be embarking on the ratification process before the end of this year.

Our equal rights policy must continue to focus firmly on our core political tasks. We must work together so that women's basic human rights are respected and observed all over the world; so that violence against women in all its forms is outlawed and eliminated; so that more women come to hold decision-making positions both in politics and in the private sector; so that the possibilities for women and men to combine family life and professional activities are improved; and so that more girls and women can decide to undertake training and pursue professions in areas which have a promising future.

Working on the implementation of these demands, which are analogous to the detailed demands comprising the Beijing Platform for Action, represents a constant challenge. It requires concrete steps towards implementation, combined with predetermined, time-bound, qualitative and quantitative requirements: time-bound targets.

That is the path we are following in Germany. Last year we decided to implement the women and work programme, which contains concrete requirements. We will be introducing legal regulations to achieve equal rights for women in public administration and in business. Another point to which we attach great importance is the need for women to be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them by the age of new information and communication technology.

We know that women will not automatically profit from the information society. That is why we are collaborating with business to achieve greater equality of opportunity in this area. We would like to increase women's presence on the Internet to 50 per cent over the next five years and the proportion of women undergoing training in information technologies and pursuing studies in the field of informatics to 40 per cent.

If we want to bring about real gender equality, men need to be more involved in family tasks and in raising children. Therefore, we have introduced a law into the legislative procedure which makes it possible for fathers and mothers to take parental leave simultaneously. During that period they are entitled to part time work of up to 30 hours per week. For two out of these three years it is possible to obtain an income-linked child-raising benefit. One year of the parental leave can be taken at a later stage until the child is eight years of age and if this is mutually agreed with the employer. All this is accompanied by a major campaign to bring about a different lead picture of fathers in society.

It was the Beijing Platform for Action that succeeded in throwing the spotlight on the problem of violence against women in all its forms and in demanding corresponding countermeasures. Violence is an issue which seriously affects women in Germany as well. With its programme of action to combat violence against women, the Federal Government presented, in December 1999, the first-ever comprehensive overall concept to combat violence. The programme of action is designed to bring about structural changes in all areas, including prevention, working with offenders, improving networks of assistance for victims, increasing awareness-building among the public and enacting legal measures, such as a law on the protection of women. For many years, discussion of the issue of violence against women has been a taboo. It is time for this to stop.

Gender mainstreaming, the strategy which emerged from the Fourth World Conference on Women, constitutes one of the points of emphasis for the Federal Government in the national implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Our objective is the

integration of an equal rights policy as a permanent and continuous task in all areas of policy and in all of the Federal Government's areas of responsibility. In Germany, this process is still in its infancy, but we are pursuing it actively, because it is my firm conviction that gender mainstreaming, in the long term, is the only means of achieving a stable relationship based on equality and partnership between women and men in our society.

The enormous response which this special session of the General Assembly is generating, both in Government circles and among the non-governmental organizations, is an impressive indication of the significance which is accorded to this topic nowadays. The draft of the final document reviews the developments which have taken place over the past five years and brings a number of the demands up to date, rendering them more concrete. The political will to implement equality between men and women worldwide has been reaffirmed by the Political Declaration. It is now up to us to mobilize all of our resources to speed up the implementation process.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Magvaši, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovakia.

Mr. Magvaši (Slovakia) (*spoke in Russian*): As a party, since 1993, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Slovak Republic has actively participated in the Commission on the Status of Women, including holding the vice-presidency. Yesterday, on behalf of the Government of the Slovak Republic, I signed the Optional Protocol to this Convention, which will be ratified in a few months.

With regard to the question of the situation of women, it can be said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had a positive influence in addressing women's issues. Through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, fundamental principles for mainstreaming were established in the Slovak Republic.

In March 1996, the Coordination Committee on Women's Issues — an advisory, initiating and coordinating body of the Government, dedicated to promoting the interests and needs of women — was set up in order to safeguard the status of women institutionally. The National Action Plan for Women in Slovakia, the basic Government programme dealing with women's issues, was drawn up in 1997 on the basis of a 10-year time-frame.

As the result of an agreement between the Government of Slovakia and the United Nations Development Programme, the National Gender Centre was created in 1997 as an information, documentation and coordination body. Its main task is to establish contacts between foreign and domestic non-governmental organizations. The next step in State regulation was the establishment in 1999 of the Department of Equal Opportunities within the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. Its first task will be to harmonize the Slovak legislation in the area of equal opportunities with that of the European Union and to review the anti-discriminatory nature of proposed legislative amendments.

In 1999, within the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, a parliamentary women's commission began work. It will make recommendations to Parliament with regard to equal opportunities and the overall advancement of women.

The Government of Slovakia is committed to reforming the labour law in order to achieve equal treatment for men and women in employment — in vocational training and job promotion, as well as in general working conditions. The new draft of the amendment to the Employment Act has strengthened the principle of equal treatment in employment by explicitly banning job advertisements that discriminate in respect of race, colour, language, gender, social origin, age, religion, political or other thinking, political adherence, trade union activity, membership in a national or ethnic group or any other status. Changes to the labour law have provided for equal treatment for women in the workforce.

The Government of Slovakia is guaranteeing the right of parents to make their own choices with regard to the compatibility of their parental and professional roles by making it possible for them to work part time. Beginning this year, a family and job audit will be carried out annually, on the basis of which awards will be granted to employers who create optimum working conditions, thereby supporting family harmony and improving the working lives of their employees.

It is necessary to emphasize the different situations of women and men in the labour market. Economic necessity means that there are a large number of women in employment. This makes women

feel more independent. In considering this question, it is necessary to compare three principles: equal pay for equal work, equal pay for work of equal value, and equal job opportunities, irrespective of gender.

The situation of women in public life and their involvement in managerial functions represent an area in which hidden discriminatory tendencies against women and inequality between women and men can be seen most clearly. The increased participation of women in managing society and in public administration, either directly or by freely selecting their representatives, is thus a strategic aim of women.

Slovakia supports United Nations activities that are creating a new, equal partnership between women and men. Our Government intends to pursue further policies to promote equality and equal opportunities for women and men by adopting measures that will implement, as broadly as possible, the conclusions of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Páll Pétursson, Minister for Social Affairs of Iceland.

Mr. Pétursson (Iceland): It is a pleasure to participate in this special session and to follow the cooperation taking place to improve the status of the world's women and girls for the purpose of achieving gender equality. It is important for us, the Member States, to make full use of the tremendous human resources which are currently being wasted as a result of the fact that women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. Thus, it is important for women to be able to participate actively in politics and in any kind of decision making. It is also important for women and men, girls and boys, to have equal access to education. It is worth mentioning that in Iceland the number of women attending university exceeds that of men.

While the Icelandic Government has made efforts to equalize the status of women and men throughout society, many are of the opinion that this development has been too slow. This is despite of the fact that the legal status of women in Iceland is one of the best in the world. We have achieved considerable progress since Beijing. It should be noted that women's representation in the Althing, the Icelandic parliament, has reached 36.5 per cent, a 10 per cent increase since Beijing in 1995.

With increased participation of women in the labour market, attitudes have changed regarding the roles played by women and men in society. More than 80 per cent of Icelandic women work outside the home. For this reason, it is increasingly demanded that mothers and fathers be offered equal opportunities to be active both within the family and in the labour market. One factor that can facilitate the coordination of family life and paid work is granting parents equal rights to maternity/paternity leave and parental leave. Legislation to this effect was passed by the Icelandic parliament this spring.

It will be interesting to observe the effects of this legislation on gender equality, as fathers will now have an independent right to a three-month paternity leave. This right is not transferable. Additionally, parents are entitled to three months paid joint leave which they can divide between themselves. The parent in question is to receive 80 per cent of his or her total wages and is not to lose job-related benefits. Furthermore, each parent is independently entitled to a 13-week parental leave.

The aim of the law is to ensure that every child is taken care of by both of its parents, and also to enable women and men to coordinate family life and paid work. Its purpose is, not the least, to encourage men to fulfil their obligations towards their children and family, on an equal basis with women. At the same time, efforts are being made to facilitate the participation of women in the labour market and make it possible for them to be on an equal footing with men. We hope this legislation will eliminate the wage difference existing between men and women, a difference that can be explained only on the basis of gender. Research has shown that women's traditional caretaking role has reduced their chances on the labour market.

New legislation on gender equality was passed this spring in Iceland, providing for equal status for men and women in every respect. Even though direct legislation in this field is considered to have limited effect if it does not have the moral support of society, it is nevertheless necessary. In order for men and women to have equal opportunities to strengthen and develop their abilities and enjoy a healthy and happy life, attitude is of crucial importance.

Trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation has received increased attention in recent years. Trafficking in women is of special concern. As this constitutes an internationally organized crime, it is essential for the world community to join hands in fighting this violation of human rights. The Icelandic Government has initiated legislation on preventive measures.

Domestic violence and other gender-related violence, is a worldwide problem. It is important for each and every country to seek ways to prevent such acts of violence and punish those responsible.

Women are subjected to injustice and discrimination worldwide in spite of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This applies to both men and women. Human rights are universal, and the disguise of religion and tradition can never be accepted as an excuse for tolerating human rights violations.

Serious human rights violations against women continue. The Secretary-General said at the opening of the special session that we had made considerable progress now that violence has been made illegal in most countries. The Icelandic Government feels that violence against women should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

For these reasons it is important for Member States to agree on actions which will improve the living conditions of men and women as we enter the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency the Honourable Portia Simpson-Miller, Minister of Tourism and Sport, with responsibility for women's affairs, of Jamaica.

Ms. Simpson-Miller (Jamaica): I begin with a line from international reggae superstar and Jamaican folk hero Bob Marley — "No Woman, No Cry". This song of reassurance, encouraging women to dry their tears, finds resonance in the hearts of Jamaican women and women around the globe who feel the effects of inequality and injustice in their daily lives. To them, gender justice is not an abstract issue for discussion in the international corridors of power, but a practical end that must be achieved. The women of the world have been meeting since 1975. Twenty-five years and four world conferences later we are still discussing much of what we should have already implemented.

This is not to deny that significant progress has been achieved by State intervention and by non-governmental organizations in a number of critical areas. I therefore come before this great body, bearing a strong message of urgency and a feeling of hope from my country that the day will come when gender equality, development and peace are realized in the world.

This urgency is based on the recognition that while the world is changing rapidly, developing countries are neither able to keep pace with the changes, nor to tackle the backlog of economic injustice and social inequalities.

We still have many of the old challenges to face, but there are newer and more stubborn challenges. Over the past decade, the countries of the South have been feeling some of the adverse effects of advancing globalization, financial crises, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the expansion of the drug culture, the seemingly never-ending armed conflicts and natural disasters. These are some of the factors that have had a negative impact on the ability of developing countries to pursue economic policies capable of generating resources for sustainable livelihoods for the majority of our people. This point is important because gender justice is impossible without economic justice and because, conversely, there can be no real economic justice until gender justice is realized.

Our task now is to remain focused on consolidating the gains that women and girls have made. We must continue to be vigilant and become even more conscious of the danger that women's issues may fall off the page altogether or be placed in a secondary position when the priorities of economic and social development are being determined. The imperative of ensuring that women have a larger voice in the decision-making process is more urgent now than ever before.

One area of particular interest that we would like to see emphasized in the outcome of this special session is the situation concerning adolescent girls. In many countries, girls are often the victims of various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. We have no choice but to pay special attention to reproductive health issues and to the rights of adolescents. The approach must be holistic because a whole network of

related issues is involved, linking education, poverty eradication and gender-based violence.

Another area of challenge is the upsurge in violence against women. Effective interventions that will have lasting impact on the elimination of all forms of violence against women are urgently required.

As we contemplate the future, we are constrained to take into account the effects of globalization on our hopes for sustainable human development and on the achievement of gender equity. While acknowledging that globalization does offer opportunities for advancement to those who are equipped to exploit them, we must be ever mindful of the serious threat it is posing to women and other vulnerable groups. The competition between large-scale and small-scale economies in the global market place is particularly threatening to the women who make their livelihoods in the agricultural and service sectors. Within the international community, we must therefore address the economic, social and political contradictions in the application of global strategies.

These strategies, if not properly and sensitively planned, will make the poorest and most marginalized women, men and children poorer and poorer and even more marginalized. Governments and multilateral and bilateral programmes of assistance must, therefore, address the eradication of poverty, as well as the plight of women and children.

The women of my country send this Assembly an urgent message: Let us make sure that our work here is effective in removing the remaining systemic barriers and traditional practices that keep significant numbers of women out of decision-making; out of economic growth; out of the health systems; and out of the total development process in our countries.

I make two appeals to this Assembly: first, that when the heads of State and Government gather here in September for the Millennium Summit, women's issues be placed squarely on their agenda and given priority in their discussions; and secondly, that Governments move from commitment to action and aggressively implement the recommendations in the Beijing Platform for Action. Only then will we be able confidently to say with Bob Marley: "No woman, no cry ... everything is gonna be alright".

Women of the world, let us more forward in confidence, because our cause is not only just, it is also politically possible, economically feasible and morally necessary.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Ms. Daphne Phillips, Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. Phillips (Trinidad and Tobago): It is an honour to address this special session of the General Assembly convened to assess the progress achieved since the adoption in 1995 of the Beijing Platform for Action and to consider further actions and initiatives to ensure that men and women alike enjoy equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Recent data show that, although women have made gains in certain areas, disparities persist between men and women in several spheres and that, in some countries, the situation of women has deteriorated. The challenge to fully implement the Platform for Action is aggravated in some countries by such factors as the negative impact of globalization and the lack of human and financial resources.

In spite of the constraints, the countries of the Caribbean region are earnestly attempting to implement the commitments made in Beijing and have developed a Regional Platform of Action. In this respect, at the Third Caribbean Ministerial Conference on Women held in Trinidad and Tobago from 5 to7 October 1999, the Port-of-Spain Consensus was adopted and has been circulated as a document of this special session.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has pledged to implement and take action on the 12 critical areas of concern articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action, on some of which I will now report.

In the area of women and poverty, a situational analysis of women in 1997 indicated that poverty is more widespread among female-headed households. Women also occupy the lowest paying, traditionally female-dominated fields of work. Conscious of the important place of women in the development of our twin island Republic, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has sought to address the issue of women and poverty through an integrated and multi-faceted approach.

The Small Business Development Company (SBDC), a government body, is the main vehicle used by Government to stimulate the micro- and small-enterprise sector. Forty-three per cent of SBDC loan

guarantees are awarded to women, 90 per cent of training recipients are women and 80 per cent of participants of the community venture programme are women, primarily rural women.

Fund Aid, a private funding institution supported by the Government, provides loans to poor persons with limited collateral to develop micro-enterprises. Sixty per cent of Fund Aid clients are women.

The Government piloted and established a Women's Leadership Enhancement Institute in 1998 and 1999, respectively. This programme seeks to enhance the capacity of women to develop sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families through creative and pertinent training. The Institute also conducts training for women in leadership, business, skills enhancement and political participation.

The Export Centre Programmes, which especially target female-headed households, refine the skills of community-based artisans and direct their fine crafts to the export market. A National Poverty Eradication Programme is being implemented by the Social Equity Council, established in 1997. This Council, which reflects the participatory approach to dealing with poverty, is chaired by an independent woman Senator and includes the active participation of non-governmental organizations and the business community.

A Cabinet-appointed task force was convened to review the educational curriculum for primary and secondary schools to address gender disparities in education which go beyond the issue of access. The work of the task force includes the development of a gender-sensitive curriculum in focus and in practice to ensure the full and equitable development of, and participation by, both boys and girls.

Measures were also implemented to improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education. These measures included two Government-piloted projects, training women in non-traditional areas such as masonry, plumbing, technical drawing, blueprint reading, construction, carpentry and electrical installation. In addition, in 1998 a Technical Agreement was signed with the Inter-American Development Bank to conduct a regional non-traditional programme for women.

Government initiatives to facilitate the productive employment and creation of sustainable livelihoods include the Women's Second Chances Programme, the Adult Education Programme and the Unemployment Relief Women's Training Programme.

In a bid to foster the strengthening of women's economic rights and remove discrimination against women, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago spearheaded several initiatives. In 1998 the Minimum Wage Law was enacted, ensuring that no category of worker was paid less than $7 per hour, and in 1998 the Maternity Protection Act guaranteed maternity leave with pay for a period of 13 weeks to all employed women.

The counting of unremunerated work and the mechanism for quantifying and recording the monetary value of such work was agreed to by the Government and implemented in the 2000 census. Trinidad and Tobago was one of the first countries to enact legislation to this effect: the Counting Unremunerated Work Act of 1996.

In Trinidad and Tobago in 1999 the Domestic Violence Act of 1991 was rewritten to equip the criminal justice system to respond more competently to domestic violence issues. Amendments to the 1986 Sexual Offences Act have recently been laid before Parliament to strengthen that law, and legislation related to sexual harassment is in the preparatory stages.

A Domestic Violence Unit was established in 1997 as part of the Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs. The Unit engages in extensive educational programmes in several schools and communities to engineer a change in the socialization processes which foster gender-based violence.

To further the work of the Unit, 23 information/drop-in centres have been established throughout the country, offering counselling services to victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault or family conflict. A 24-four hour National Domestic Violence Hotline has been in operation since 1996. This allows victims a toll-free listening, counselling and reference service to police and shelters.

In an effort to ensure an integrated approach to the issue of violence against women, the Domestic Violence Unit operates training programmes for persons who interface with victims of gender-based violence on a regular basis. Police officers, hotline

listeners, social workers, shelter and safe-house managers and other interested persons are involved in training programmes on a regular basis. A structured and ongoing four-module programme is also being implemented, as well as a programme for pre-secondary-school students.

Trinidad and Tobago, in the promotion of gender equality, encountered several constraints. These include deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and practices, the impact of globalization, structural and institutional obstacles and lack of adequate financial and human resources.

It is our responsibility at this special session to identify, from the experiences enunciated, the remaining challenges to achieve further advancement of women and adopt relevant strategies for action. In order to realize the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and to implement further initiatives, there is also a need to build partnerships both within and between countries, and to ensure that adequate human and financial resources are available, so that no individuals, especially women and girls, are marginalized or made vulnerable in a world in which we face new challenges through such forces as globalization.

These are some of the areas being addressed by Trinidad and Tobago. A fuller and more comprehensive report is being circulated.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Hamilton Lashley, Minister of Social Transformation of Barbados.

Mr. Lashley (Barbados): In the five short years since Beijing, we have been witnesses to and active participants in a new world order in which multilateral and global-centred relations and interests predominate and reshape the fortunes and destinies of our nations.

In this new power-based, technology-driven, international trading system, globalization and liberalization have become the most fundamental challenges confronting all nations. Their effects on the smallest, most vulnerable and least able to adapt, such as the small island developing States, are far-reaching. Barbados and other developing nations confront a myriad of challenges, which threaten to confine our citizens, in particular our women and children, to remaining a vulnerable group.

This special session provides us with the opportunity to assess the progress made in achieving greater gender equality, consolidate gains, and identify and focus our efforts on areas which continue to be of greatest concern. Barbados, as a small island developing State, has been equally affected by these global changes, and consequently has remained committed to the goals of Beijing, which identify strategies to improve the condition of women globally.

We have focused on five areas for priority action: institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in all areas of development; women in poverty; violence against women; women in decision-making; and women and health, especially reproductive and sexual health.

The Ministry of Social Transformation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, non-governmental organizations and civil society, now carries out the work in these areas. Mindful of the pivotal role which women play in the social and economic development of society, the Ministry of Social Transformation combines women's affairs with social services, child care, community development, national assistance, care of the elderly, urban development, the national disability unit and the Poverty Bureau. This new Ministry also seeks to rationalize the existing social service agencies and to implement the priority strategies listed in the Beijing Platform for Action.

A positive initiative of this new Ministry has been the introduction of gender mainstreaming. To this end, the national machinery for women is being strengthened. A number of focal points have been established across ministries and departments to facilitate the gender management system.

Globally, violence against women has been identified as a priority area for action. Throughout the 1990s this issue has galvanized Government and non-governmental action in the Caribbean. This heightened activity in the area of violence against women surfaced in 1992, when the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women formally defined gender-based violence as a manifestation of gender-based discrimination.

The recognition that violence against women is a phenomenon which is devastating to the development of a stable society has led to the establishment of mechanisms to tackle the problem in Barbados.

Legislation against domestic violence has been enacted, and a shelter for battered women has been provided by the Government and is managed by leaders of civil society. Legal aid is provided to victims, and the family services department of the Ministry provides counselling for families. There has also been public education in relation to domestic violence and the legal provisions which exist to manage and prevent it. Training programmes have been established for our police officers and personnel in the crisis centres, and a joint civilian/police victim support programme has been instituted.

It has been globally established that the bulk of poverty in developing countries is among women, possibly 70 per cent. In Barbados and the Caribbean, these women are often single heads of households and are therefore the principal, if not sole, breadwinners for families. Any conscious effort to eliminate poverty must therefore be an attempt to ameliorate the economic and social conditions of women. Consequently, in Barbados the alleviation of poverty has been identified as a priority area for action in advancing the status of women. While the chronic poor are not confined to women and include other vulnerable groups, there are issues related to gender which are structurally linked to poverty. The Government of Barbados has established a poverty eradication fund and has embarked on a series of measures to boost entrepreneurial activities that increase self-employment and create more employment among the unemployed youth and women. Barbados has also established a Social Investment Fund, which currently provides loans for poor, disadvantaged persons with a view to developing small business entrepreneurship. The Barbados Government has undertaken this programme in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme.

It has been established that good health is one of the ingredients inherent in the attainment of sustainable development. Given the fundamental role which women play in development, women's health status must be a factor for any society's growth. Barbados holds as its philosophy that the right to health care is a fundamental human right. Therefore, it maintains a health-care system of high quality with free health care for all. Government also makes provisions for maternal health care, a free drug service for children, the elderly and the chronically ill and a family planning service.

With respect to sexually transmitted diseases, worldwide it has been noted that increasingly the HIV/AIDS disease is one which affects poor women. The World Health Organization statistics show that the Caribbean region has the second highest adult prevalence globally. An alarming 33 per cent of HIV-positive adults are women. Barbados has participated in regional programmes, assisted by United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women, in community-based research on the socio-economic factors that make women vulnerable to AIDS, as well as in advisory programmes aimed at AIDS education and prevention.

Recognizing that HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases pose significant problems for women and girls and place an added burden on women as health-care providers for the family, Government has moved to introduce a gender perspective in the delivery of health services.

In tackling the problem of HIV/AIDS, Barbados has instituted the formation of a National AIDS Committee. It is a concrete expression of the national will to confront the complex problems associated with the HIV pandemic. Through the Committee, public awareness programmes have been instituted and the public has been sensitized and educated in AIDS prevention programmes.

With regard to women in decision-making, in Barbados there are no restrictions on women's participation in public and political life. Our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade is a woman. The Minister of Education and the Central Bank Governor are also women. Even with these significant and symbolic achievements, women in political office constitute a small minority, since women still tend not to stand for elective office. Barbados hopes to ameliorate this situation through education and training. Indeed, through a gradual process our women are rising to prominent leadership roles in all sectors.

Barbados supports the view that men must involve themselves in all areas of society and must take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality and promote social integration. To this end, Government is promoting a number of programmes to foster gender awareness and sensitivity.

In the midst of a global environment that is hostile for small island developing States, Barbados

has struggled to meet the challenges of globalization and has maintained its development goals even in the most trying economic times. One of the negative consequences of globalization and structural adjustment programmes has been the feminization of poverty. Barbados therefore joins those who call for the reform of the international financial institutions, and we continue to insist on an increase in and further improvement of financial and technical assistance that targets human and social development in small States and in developing nations. Measures like these will help achieve some success for our poverty eradication programmes aimed at women, children and men.

The various United Nations conferences on social and economic development, which took place half a decade ago, have not produced all the results we longed for and to which we committed ourselves at Copenhagen and Beijing. Let us hope that this review of Beijing will prick the conscience of the whole world to achieve the betterment of humankind. I must remind the Assembly, on behalf of our delegation from Barbados, that we must let no obstacle be greater than the cause.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kotbi Al-Mahdi, Minister of Social Planning of the Sudan.

Mr. Al-Mahdi (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): God says in the Koran:

> "O people! be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same kind and spread from these two many men and women; and be careful of your duty to Allah, by Whom you demand one of another your rights, and to the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watches over you". (*The Holy Koran, IV:1*)

I wish at the outset to congratulate the President and the other Assembly officers on the occasion of this special session on the theme of "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We are extremely grateful to the Secretariat for its efforts regarding the advancement of women.

It has been five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held at Beijing. We reaffirm my Government's commitment to the goals identified at that conference: to achieve the advancement of women and to improve their status at all levels. We are further committed to implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. This session provides an opportunity to review the implementation of the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, not to reverse or revise the consensus text that it represents.

I wish to speak briefly about achievements for women and by women in my country, and about the obstacles we face in attaining the goals before us. The Government of the Sudan attaches special importance to the women's sector and to integrating it with other sectors. Immediately following the Beijing Conference, my Government formed a high-level committee chaired by the Minister of Social Planning, and with the participation of both official and voluntary bodies, to follow up the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In that connection the Sudan has reaffirmed that education, health, peace, the stability of family and society, fighting poverty and promoting development are priority areas.

Sudanese women have held high positions in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the Government; their rights and duties have been protected by a series of laws and by successive post-independence constitutions. They have all the rights enjoyed by men. Article 21 of the 1998 Sudanese constitution stipulates that all are equal before the law, and that all Sudanese share equal rights and duties as well as the right to hold public office. It stipulates that there can be no discrimination based on race, sex or religion, and that all are equal in their ability to qualify for public jobs and public responsibilities.

Since independence, women have been direct participants in our political life; they attained the right to run for office and to vote in 1965. Since 1969 women have held ministerial positions; recently, a woman was appointed as an adviser to the President of the Republic on women's and children's affairs. A number of women have been appointed as Supreme Court judges, as ambassadors and as governors. Women are in charge of many media entities, such as the official Sudanese news agency.

The Government has set up many institutional mechanisms to improve the status of women, in addition to civil-society organizations that are helping implement our national plan for the advancement of women. There has been a marked improvement in the status of women in terms of general education.

Statistics indicate that the rate of admission of women to preparatory education has risen from 60 per cent in 1995 to 69 per cent at the end of 1999.

In the Sudan, there have been great advances in higher education. Between 1989 and 1999 there has been great progress also in secondary education. According to a 1997 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on education in Africa, Sudan ranks fourth on the "A" list of the top 10 African States in terms of quality of higher education. The State has devoted great attention to public and private institutions of higher learning to prepare them to face the challenges of the twenty-first century and to take advantages of new opportunities. The most recent phase of our plan, since 1995, has focused on education in high technology as a key element of development. Statistics for higher education between 1995 and 1999 indicate an increased rate of admission of women to the various institutions of higher learning, with their number standing at 24,012: 62 per cent, compared with 47.3 per cent for the 1995-1996 academic year.

Moreover, the Sudan has been waging a campaign to eliminate illiteracy, which has resulted in a decline in illiteracy of females from the 83 per cent shown in the 1993 census to 57.6 per cent today. The Sudan was one of the first States to implement the recommendations of the Jamathin conference and other conferences on education policies.

In the Sudan there have also been advances in family planning, in combating harmful practices and in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases in our society. There are several programmes for the training of health-care workers.

The Sudan has established many programmes to encourage the participation of women in the process of peace, in which women are now playing a major role, as reflected in the Maastricht declaration adopted at a symposium on Sudanese women and peace. That role is reflected in the contribution of Sudanese women to the peace process in the war-torn states of southern Sudan, which are particularly affected by the ongoing conflict. They are involved in decision-making, the settlement of disputes and disseminating a culture of peace. Special attention is devoted to women and girls who are victims of the ongoing armed conflict.

My country continues to implement programmes for integrated and sustainable development. But like every other developing and least developed country, the Sudan still faces many obstacles to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, including the decline in official development assistance and the fact that developed countries have not met their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of gross national product to assistance to developing countries. We regret that this continues five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in spite of an international agreement to meet that objective. The debt burden continues to weigh heavily upon these countries. Economic sanctions and unilateral coercive measures by some States are other factors that have impeded our national development effort.

Let me reiterate what we have said in many other forums: implementation of commitments under international agreements must take place in the framework of full respect for the sovereignty of States and for the specific national, political, economic, cultural, religious and historical characteristics of every society. I note that we are living in an age of many conflicts and wars that are being used by some to achieve their own political and economic agendas; it is women, children and families that suffer.

We therefore call for an affirmation of noble human values, in order to limit negative social phenomena that diminish the dignity of women and that exploit them commercially. We appeal for a return to the traditional family as prescribed by all divine values, and to a good society in which women play their natural role: that of bringing new generations into the world for the sake of a better future.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency, Ms. Noëline Jaotody, Minister for Population, the Advancement of Women and Children of Madagascar.

Ms. Jaotody (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): I should like to pay tribute to the Assembly on behalf of the Government and the people of Madagascar, a country which I, together with the other members of our delegation, have the honour of representing at this session.

I should also like to express our warmest thanks to the entire United Nations system, in particular to the Secretary-General, the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session and to the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee. Thanks to their efforts, we are

holding the twenty-third special session, which has brought us together today, both Member States and observers.

Twenty-five years have passed since the first World Conference of the International Women's Year — 25 years during which the various United Nations women's conferences have caused a growing number of men and women to become active partners of the world programme of action for gender equality. They have stimulated research, strengthened advocacy activity and encouraged the adoption of policies for the advancement of women. They have created greater awareness of the gender-specific dimensions of equality, development and peace.

The working documents produced by the Commission on the Status of Women, including summaries of the reports of Member States in their various regional, international and national groupings, have served as the basis for discussion in the various working groups. Such groupings include the Group of 77 and China, the European Union and the JUSCANZ group of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United States.

The major new approach is the integration of a strategy aimed at including the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men in the creation, implementation, monitoring and evolution of policies and programmes in all areas — political, economic and social — so that women and men may benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

Such was the approach strategy of the Beijing Platform for Action. What has my country done? Forty years of independence have elapsed — 40 years in which careful progress towards equality between the sexes has made its presence felt in all the constitutions of the Republic of Madagascar, and continues to do so today. This has been highlighted by the institution of a humanistic and ecologically based Republic in which men and women, equal partners in development, are artisans of development for the mastery of nature and the fulfilment of humankind.

The fight against poverty and the establishment of good governance have guided the various successive Governments of Madagascar, with special emphasis placed on actions to benefit vulnerable groups, including women and children. This has been achieved thanks to the allocation of more than 20 per cent of the domestic budget to the areas of education and health. The national health policy — in particular, risk-free motherhood — has led to a reduction of the mortality rate of both mothers and children. The rate of access to health care will increase from 50 per cent in 2000 to 90 per cent in 2015.

In the area of education, after Beijing the national action plan for the education of girls was established in October 1995, inspired to a great extent by the recommendations of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, of which Madagascar is a member. Thus, there has been a net improvement in the level of schooling for girls, which is now at 77 per cent, as compared with 74.5 per cent for boys. In this context, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to support the priorities defined by the Secretary-General in his millennium report, document A/54/2000, particularly with respect to the access of girls, on an equal footing with boys, to all educational levels from now until the year 2015.

The Government of Madagascar's attainment of the objective of a growth rate of 4.8 per cent has enabled the per capita income to increase. This positive trend is reflected, among other developments, in a great increase in skilled labour in tax-free zone enterprises, 90 per cent of which are owned by women, and in micro-financing policies that are accessible to women, such as mutual savings and credit.

With regard to the effective participation of women in decision-making, the process of establishing the self-governing provinces in Madagascar has furthered locally based management practices, resulting in a great number of women entering local government as mayors and municipal councillors, while in the judiciary, 50 per cent of the judges are women and 75 per cent of decision-making posts are held by women.

In the area of the economy and finance, high-level posts such as the Director General of the Treasury and the Director of the Public Investment Project are held by women. Furthermore, a general mobilization of public and private enterprises has been undertaken by my department since the Beijing Conference in order to enhance the legal status of women. Hence, very soon we will be adopting a law against violence against women. In this context, Madagascar welcomes the adoption of resolution 54/134, by which the General Assembly decided to designate 25 November as the

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Five years have elapsed since the Government of Madagascar adopted the Beijing Declaration and Programme for Action and established a follow-up mechanism for the Programme for Action within the Ministry of Population, the Advancement of Women and Children, which I have the honour to head. They have been five years of concerted activity between the various development partners, such as non-governmental organizations, associations, groups, international organizations and civil society, that have been moving towards equality between men and women. This political will has been achieved by, on the one hand, a huge reform programme in the public sector in various areas and, on the other, the establishment and implementation of policies, strategies and programmes in the area of development.

I should like to mention in particular the national strategy to combat poverty and the first national population programme. The national strategy to combat poverty defines a strategic framework for action to fight generalized poverty. The national population programme, adopted in 1997, is contributing to this struggle by including in its objectives and strategies the various recommendations of the different international conferences, in particular the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development and the Beijing Conference on Women. The main strategy of the population programme is to take into account the variables of population and gender discrimination.

Madagascar has rediscovered the road towards economic growth. Our achievements in this area in 1997, especially with regard to inflation, established a sound basis for progress towards development.

An improved distribution of the fruits of this growth is one of the priorities of the Government for the coming years. Thus, the duty and responsibility of each entity, whether public or private, is to continue improving the recovery programme in order to create an environment that will favour the promotion of women and sustainable human development.

To conclude, the delegation of Madagascar expresses the hope that these discussions will be guided by our shared determination to carry out concerted and specific measures that will help us face the challenges of this new millennium.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Mintata Mint Hedeid, Secretary of State for the Status of Women of Mauritania.

Mrs. Hedeid (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first and foremost to express my pleasure at seeing Mr. Gurirab preside over this special session of the General Assembly devoted to evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action. I am convinced that, thanks to his high moral and intellectual qualities, this session will be successful.

This special session provides us with the opportunity to take stock of what has been done since Beijing, to pinpoint the obstacles encountered and to adopt new measures and initiatives in order to overcome them.

In this context, my country has pursued and consolidated economic, social and political reforms, which have been taking place since the middle of the eighties. The establishment of pluralistic democracy has led to profound changes, both at the level of the legal and institutional environment and at the economic, social and cultural level.

These changes have enabled us to restore major macroeconomic balances, to create the conditions for sustainable growth and to set up a coherent strategy to fight poverty and to encourage grass-roots development. This strategy has allowed us to reduce poverty and to improve significantly people's access to basic social services, such as education, health, drinking water and food.

The overall percentage of children in full-time education went from 46 per cent in 1990 to 90 per cent in 1999. The figures for girls improved in particular, going from 40 per cent in 1990 to 84 per cent in 1999.

The improvement of the various economic and social indicators has led to a considerable drop in poverty. These significant results testify to the efforts made by Mauritania in matters of social development. Indeed, the resources allocated to the social sectors reached almost 37 per cent of public expenditure for the period 1990-1998, which is approximately twice the level recommended by the Copenhagen Summit.

This positive outcome was welcomed by our partners in development and has shown our country to be one of the first to benefit from the initiative in favour of the most heavily indebted countries.

Mauritania, the first African country to have a policy relating to the allocation of debt relief resources to the reduction of poverty, adopted last November a strategy to fight against poverty in order to bring the numbers of the poor down to 12 per cent of the population by the year 2015, to make primary education and basic health care widespread by 2002 and to eliminate all gender and regional inequalities.

With respect to the advancement of women, the governmental policy has consisted of increasing full-time education for girls, favouring women's education, promoting their effective participation in public affairs and encouraging women's access to economic resources through the emergence of local microfinancing institutions.

The Government's will in this area has been reflected in the elaboration and adoption of a national strategy for women's advancement, supported by a declaration on population policy. This strategy provides a framework that establishes the Government's choices with respect to women's advancement, bearing in mind the recommendations of the Beijing Conference.

The implementation of this strategy has made it possible to reduce gender inequalities and to fight poverty in rural and urban areas by means of the continuing increase in the percentage of girls in the education system; the financing of small projects benefiting women; the promotion of savings and access to loans; the creation of job opportunities; the improvement of women's capacities in the areas of management, production, and support for small businesses managed by women, whose activities are aimed at improving the living conditions of the population in general, and of women in particular; attaching particular importance to professional, technical and academic education for women; and vaccination campaigns for mothers and children.

Also, thanks to this new direction, Mauritanian women have entered Government, Parliament and the municipal councils as well as senior decision-making posts in the civil service and the private sector.

We now have more than 2,000 cooperatives and women's associations operating in the areas of promotion of the family, arts and crafts, agriculture, trade and tourism. This movement of associations that work for the advancement of women, their legal protection and the improvement of their economic and social conditions receives the support of my department. This partnership has allowed for considerable progress in such important areas as microfinancing, saving and loans.

My Government's efforts are currently geared towards the consolidation of all these achievements and the coordination of policies and programmes relating to the advancement of women. Particular attention is given to education, training and income-generating activities, as well as the introduction of the gender approach in all development policies.

The main axes of the family policy and a national strategy on behalf of small children are being developed in conformity with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also testifies to my country's adherence to the values of human rights and, most particularly, women's fundamental rights.

The implementation of the priorities established by the Government and the recommendations of Beijing was supported by activities of public awareness and social mobilization. My department drew up a plan to use all the channels and materials of information, education and communication to combat any ideas and social impediments that could hinder the effective participation of women in social and economic development. These efforts have allowed the establishment of a foundation conducive to the advancement of women, their economic independence and the strengthening of their social and political position as actors in development.

The climate of freedom, democracy and security in my country has been a determining factor for the success of social development programmes in general and for those relating to the advancement of women in particular. Carried out in close consultation with partners in development and civil society, these programmes have been based primarily on fighting poverty; women and decision-making; and support for the associations.

These are the main achievements that my country has made since the Beijing Conference. They demonstrate the interest that my Government places in the advancement of women, which is limited solely by constraints linked to our level of development.

This special session, being held at the dawn of a new millennium and devoted to the situation of the half of humanity that has long been relegated to second place, should make a difference by helping to secure adequate resources for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which has been impacted by the decline in official development assistance and by reduced resources. In so doing, this session will have contributed to establishing the bases of a more equitable world in greater solidarity, one that guarantees to all its daughters and sons equality, development and peace.

The Acting President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Kamala Pant, Minister of State for Women, Children and Social Welfare of Nepal.

Ms. Pant (Nepal): I join previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Gurirab for assuming the presidency of this important session. I am confident that his able leadership will guide the session to its fruitful conclusion, towards which my delegation extends its full cooperation.

As one of the participating countries in the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, Nepal, along with the rest of the world community, expressed full commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Conference. Immediately after the Beijing Conference, a separate Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare was established in Nepal, which then formulated a National Plan of Action on the 12 critical areas of concern. The current Ninth Five-Year Plan of Nepal takes full cognizance of the National Plan of Action. The main policies of the Plan for women are gender mainstreaming in all developmental activities, reduction of gender disparities and empowerment of women. These have been the guiding policies for all our programmes, including the recently launched nationwide programme for political, social and economic empowerment of women at the grass roots level, which will cover all villages of Nepal within five years.

A recent national review, a full report of which is being made available, shows that there have been some improvements towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal, but that progress has been slow and much remains to be achieved. There have been various other initiatives after Beijing, but their effective implementation has been constrained mainly by frequent changes of Governments, especially between 1995 and 1999, the traditional patriarchal society of Nepal, and resource constraints. Despite some recent achievements in increasing women's access to education and health services, the overall educational and health status of Nepalese women remains unsatisfactory. Some laws that are discriminatory to women still exist, although a civil code amendment bill has already been submitted to Parliament. Ensuring respect for the human rights of women and violence against women — especially trafficking, dowry-related and domestic — are significant problems. Women's participation in the economy is still mostly in traditional and less productive sectors and their true contributions to the national economy are yet to be fully accounted for.

The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 ensures 20 per cent representation by women among elected members of local bodies. This provision has made it possible for about 40,000 women to participate in these bodies. Representation of women in Parliament has also increased over the years. However, their representation in key decision-making political positions and in the civil service is still very low.

Nepal will be investing increasingly in the social sector to improve the living conditions of people in general and women in particular. In 1995, about 30 per cent of the total national budget was allocated to the social sector, which has increased to over 35 per cent of the budget this year.

The recent establishment of a Human Rights Commission will play an important role in protecting and improving the human rights situation of women. Similarly, the soon-to-be-established National Commission on Women is expected to improve the effectiveness of various efforts being undertaken to increase gender equality and women's empowerment.

I am pleased to say that Nepal has a vibrant movement of non-governmental organizations, which has been an ally of the Government in Nepal's efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Non-governmental organizations have been particularly effective in raising awareness of women's issues, changing attitudes and advocacy and as lobbying and pressure groups both in Nepal and abroad. This partnership will be further strengthened and a broader partnership with the private and other sectors will be sought in our efforts to achieve our goals for women.

We will further intensify our efforts, as we are fully aware that, without the equal and meaningful partnership of women, our problem of endemic poverty and underdevelopment will not diminish. We will do our best. Understandably, however, our efforts alone will not be enough. We are aware that the greatest responsibility rests with the individual nations. Their actions will go a long way towards improving the status of women in their own countries. This, however, does not lessen the responsibility of the world community, especially the developed countries, many of whose resource commitments expressed in various world conferences remain unfulfilled. In spite of the fact that the developed economies are doing well, it is a sad irony that, except for a few exemplary countries, official development assistance from the developed countries is decreasing, both in real terms and as a proportion of their gross domestic product.

To conclude, Nepal once again renews its commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. This is not because others say so, but because this is imperative for us. Nepal also urges the world community, especially the developed world, to be much more forthcoming in the fulfilment of their commitment to the cause of women of the world.

It will be most unfortunate if our next review still finds the situation of women not significantly improved due to unfulfilled commitments. This review session, therefore, is the right time for all partners to reflect on their own commitments and to rededicate themselves, in the spirit of true partnership, to gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

The Acting President *(spoke in French):* I now give the floor to Her Excellency Baroness Margaret Jay of Paddington, Minister for Women and leader of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Baroness Jay of Paddington (United Kingdom): It gives me great pleasure to present the United Kingdom national statement to this conference. We have come a long way since 1995. In the United Kingdom we have driven through a new approach to improving women's lives.

I am the Minister for Women in the Cabinet, and I am here with my ministerial colleague, Valerie Amos, who has special responsibility for the work on the women's development agenda. I work with the Women's Unit in the Cabinet Office, at the heart of Government, to implement policies across the whole of Government — policies that give opportunity and choice to women. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that women in the United Kingdom and throughout the world can achieve their true potential.

Our approach in the United Kingdom is driven by our commitment to fairness, social justice and equality of opportunity. We want everyone to have the chance to fulfil their potential. These are values that we hold at home and values that I know all of us here today share.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that global economic success and the elimination of poverty depends on the fulfilment of our commitment to uphold the human rights and freedoms of women. Women make up half the global workforce. We work in a wide variety of roles: as farmers, in commerce, in manufacturing, in the service industries and as business owners and entrepreneurs.

But there remain major economic inequalities between men and women — inequalities in access to land and credit; the gap between women's and men's lifetime incomes; and women's unpaid workloads, such as childcare, domestic and community work.

We can address these differences, these imbalances, by improving women's choices and opportunities in education and training. We must equip women to play a full and equal part in the twenty-first century economy by lifelong learning programmes which include the new technologies and new skills.

This is precisely what we are doing in the United Kingdom and through our international development efforts. Education is at the heart of our strategy. In the United Kingdom, girls excel at school. More girls than boys now go to college or to university; that is a rise of 14 per cent in just 16 years.

But when women leave school, they are still mostly working in low-paid jobs. Sixty per cent of women are in the 10 lowest-paid occupations in the United Kingdom. This occupational segregation is the main cause of the gap between women's and men's lifetime earnings. To redress this imbalance, we are finding ways to encourage girls into non-traditional and higher-paid occupations.

Education enhances economic and life choices. It improves health. There is no stronger argument for renewing our commitment and accelerating our progress towards meeting the Beijing objectives.

Closing gender gaps in education must be our top priority. Equality cannot be a reality while there are still 600 million women in the world who can neither read nor write.

In the United Kingdom we are committed to developing economic policies for growth and for prosperity. We are also committed to social policies that tackle poverty and social exclusion and therefore improve choice and opportunity for everyone.

Over the past 25 years in my country an economic and employment revolution has taken place. There are more women at work than ever before in the United Kingdom. Over half of all women — double the number 25 years ago — now work, and eight out of 10 mothers work outside the home.

Since 1997 our Government has introduced new measures to support women's choices: a National Minimum Wage, which gave over one million women an immediate pay raise and closed the pay gap between men and women by 1 per cent in just one year; improved employment rights for all part-time workers — the majority of whom are women — including improved rights to parental leave; a tax credit system for low-income families which includes help with childcare costs; a National Childcare Strategy which aims to provide new childcare places for one million children; and the development of a new framework to provide support for women who want to set up their own businesses.

These measures, along with others, are designed to lift working families in the United Kingdom out of poverty and give women the opportunity to have successful working lives as well as successful home lives.

We recognize that we can also do more throughout the world by working in partnership to improve women's contribution to the global economy and to improve their social status. In the current, rapidly expanding economic context, the continuing existence of a pay gap between men and women is both an anomaly and an inefficiency.

In the last six months, the United Kingdom Women's Unit has published research which exposes for the first time the true extent of that pay gap within the United Kingdom. It is a horrifying fact that the averagely educated woman earns nearly a quarter of a million pounds sterling, or nearly $400,000, less than her male counterpart. That is over her lifetime, and it is simply as a result of being female. It is what we call the female forfeit. If she has children, she forgoes a further 140,000 pounds, or just over $200,000.

These facts are stark, and we must tackle the root causes of this continuing anomaly. Women in developing countries, who make up the majority of the world's poor, suffer even more acutely. In this global age, we must strive for true economic equality for women everywhere.

Women will not be able to achieve their potential if they do not have equal access to health services. Reproductive and sexual rights are fundamental. If women are not healthy, our societies and our economies will not be healthy. This is especially apparent when we consider the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is set to challenge the success of the global economy. Women now represent half of all adults infected with HIV, and more women than men are now contracting the virus. I welcome the fact that the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations is to look more closely at this important issue.

Before concluding, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to our document "Equality in practice: A celebration and an agenda for the future", which we published today. It documents examples of good practice by the United Kingdom Government and our partners, at home and abroad, in supporting women's contribution to their economies, their communities and their families. For example, it includes the partnerships our Department for International Development has formed in many countries to provide support to women's enterprise through micro-credit and other schemes. It reflects that a lot has been done and a lot achieved since 1995, but it also makes it very clear that there is still much more to do.

We should pledge ourselves to go forward from this meeting with renewed determination to accelerate our progress, so that we can liberate the potential of women everywhere. Let us remember our purpose. This is not a "talking shop" — we, as State leaders, are here to recommit to achieving the goal we set ourselves five years ago — the goal of equality for women everywhere.

I hope I have shown in these brief few minutes how the adoption of a positive approach to the women's agenda in our work in the United Kingdom

has enabled us to support women's choices and aspirations. We have done a lot to deliver these, but there is a lot still to do.

Of course, we need to work in partnership with others, including non-governmental organizations and business and trade unions, to bring about long-term, sustainable change. We want to work with the United Nations and with all present to ensure that opportunities are extended to the majority of women in every country. We want everyone to share in the wealth and success that is being generated worldwide. If we maintain our ideals and combine these with practical strategies and practical action, women will have real choice and will fulfil their aspirations, and all our societies will be enhanced by their vital and important contribution.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on Her Excellency Ms. Annelies Verstand-Bogaert, Secretary of State for Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands.

Ms. Verstand-Bogaert (Netherlands): Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Beijing, New York: stopovers on the long road that leads to the emancipation of women all over the world. These are places for looking back, places for explanation and reflection and places for scouting new ways and for mapping out routes.

Beijing, 5 years ago: I remember the colourful diversity, the differences of opinion; so many languages, so many cultures, so many wishes, so many ideals. And still there were moments when all those different people spoke with one voice.

Beijing led to the adoption of the Platform for Action. Implementation of the high ideals that had been set out in so many declarations and resolutions in the previous years — that was what we intended to do, each one in her own country, in her own language and in her own culture.

Action: action speaks louder than words. Take, for instance, gender mainstreaming, making gender an integral part of government policy. And not just because we have resolved to do so, but because it benefits all of society and because we cannot ignore gender without paying the price.

In the past five years, the Netherlands has put words into action. In the Netherlands, emancipation policy is now becoming an integral part of government policy. All ministries have formulated action plans with concrete targets and activities to integrate emancipation. What is more, the process of implementation is actually under way; sometimes maybe slowly, but steadily.

The European Union has acknowledged that trafficking in women can be effectively prevented and combated only if all parties involved — non-governmental organizations, aid organizations, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, embassies and migration authorities — cooperate with one another. That is gender mainstreaming at the European level. What specifically matters now is the appointment of national rapporteurs on the prevention and combating of trafficking in women. The Netherlands was the first country to make such an appointment. My hope is that other countries will follow shortly because the international exchange of information on these developments is crucial for combating this organized crime.

The Netherlands is making an effort to enhance the participation of women and the integration of gender expertise in the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The contribution of women to the prevention of conflicts, to the formulation of mandates for missions, to the preservation of peace and to the implementation of peace treaties has become indispensable.

Since Beijing there is a lot to report, but there still remains a lot to do. That is becoming increasingly clear to us. The world is getting smaller all the time. Via multimedia, our eyes and ears are present in the remotest corners of the world, and that small, big world opens our eyes to differences — differences between cultures, religions and traditions, in and between countries and peoples; differences in development, socially, economically, and politically; a colourful diversity, as we experience more and more within our own multi-ethnic society.

It is precisely this variety, this diversity that holds an important challenge for future emancipation policies, nationally and internationally. Women and men should have the opportunity to build an independent life based on equal rights, opportunities and liberties, despite any differences in sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The message for future emancipation policies is to work towards conditions for a pluriform society in

which diversity is the basic assumption and in which discrimination is not tolerated. Freedom of choice for women and men is essential and should be ensured in all phases of life. Each individual should have the option of an economically independent life and a fair distribution of labour, care and income, free of poverty and violence.

This vision does not allow any violations of human rights. Recently, the Netherlands Government published a policy paper "From women's lib to inalienable rights", which presents our vision in this connection. The rights-based approach is also one of our main objectives during this special session of the General Assembly.

Diversity means doing justice to variety. But diversity is more. Diversity also implies that there are boundaries to some of the values and standards of people's cultures, boundaries that are crossed when the universal rights of women, the human rights of women, are violated. Therefore, diversity should always be regarded in a context of non-discrimination and of compliance with universal human rights.

When we speak of violation of human rights of women, we particularly have in mind violence against their sexual and reproductive rights and issues such as violence against women, sexual abuse, trafficking in women, female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes.

Recent figures show that on a global scale at least one in three women has been battered or sexually abused in her life. Then there are the consequences women and men have to suffer as a result of their sexual orientation and as victims of harmful traditional practices and of crimes committed in the name of honour.

Every day we are confronted by figures and practices that do not fail to shock us, and this urges us to take further action. Recent figures show that women are struck hardest by the catastrophe of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The Netherlands is the second largest donor country when it comes to HIV/AIDS. Even so, we are aware that this is but a drop in the ocean. There is still a lot more to be done. The AIDS virus takes millions of victims precisely where ignorance reigns and where no contraceptives are being used: in traditional societies, with traditional practices, where women are married off, even though their future husbands carry AIDS, and where women contaminate their children through breast-feeding.

What is required first and foremost is information, for women and from a woman's perspective. But secondly, political leadership, full acknowledgement and a fully open public debate on the scourge of HIV/AIDS are necessary. What is required is education, breaking taboos and promoting the use of contraceptives. We know that this will work; we can see it from countries where a radical change for the better has taken place. What is equally necessary is that women's rights, sexual rights and reproductive rights be respected and that women also be free to use them: free from threats of coercion, discrimination and violence. Very often this still is not the case.

This creates obligations. It compels us to take action, for instance, against female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes. I am referring to action in the field of information, education and prosecution. Harmful traditional practices that violate the human rights of women cannot be tolerated. Sexual and reproductive rights also imply sex education for young people and support for teenage mothers, so that pregnancies may be avoided and choices for the future made. In the Netherlands we know that this works, because the rate of abortion in the Netherlands is the lowest in the world.

Acknowledgement of diversity and the creation of the conditions that enable freedom of choice for women and men in every phase of their lives: this calls for action, so that women and men, free from violence and discrimination, can truly choose the form of cohabitation that they wish, their sexual orientation not being any hindrance. That is why Dutch legislation includes registered domestic partnership for partners of the same sex. And right now, there is even a bill under discussion that would make marriage between homosexuals possible.

Action: that was the key word in Beijing five years ago, when the Platform for Action came to be. As far as the Netherlands is concerned, it still is the key word. The Netherlands wants to strongly support this cause once again — indeed, with increased urgency. A world rich in diversity, but based on equal treatment and the acknowledgement of the universal rights of women: that is what we all should aim for.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lazaros Savvides,

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order of Cyprus.

Mr. Savvides (Cyprus): My delegation has aligned itself with the statement of the European Union.

It is a great honour and privilege to address the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, dedicated to the appraisal and assessment of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is indeed very important now, at the beginning of the new millennium and five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, to take stock of all the important work that has been done, to identify and discuss the problems and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Platform for Action and to consider further actions and initiatives to accelerate its implementation.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Commission on the Status of Women, which served as a preparatory committee for this special session, as well as to all the specialized agencies which have been actively involved in the various preparatory activities.

The Beijing Conference expanded the agenda on the human rights of women, renewing hopes for the achievement of gender equality and for the advancement of women. Worldwide, women's issues have been and will continue to be inspired and developed within the framework of the guidelines and the strategic objectives set in the Beijing Platform for Action.

For Cyprus, the Beijing Conference has given new impetus, strengthened political will and intensified efforts towards legal and de facto equality, which have been promoted in particular ever since the 1985 ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a most important landmark in the advancement of women. Cyprus also welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to that Convention, which it considers to be yet another important step forward.

Based on the Platform for Action and the commitments made by the Government of Cyprus at the Beijing Conference, we are very pleased to observe that progress has been achieved in all critical areas of concern, and in particular in those areas which fall within our priorities, including the following.

Legal reform aiming at the elimination of the few remaining discriminatory provisions and the further safeguarding of women's rights in all fields of law has been pursued with very positive results.

In addition to a series of laws in the field of family and labour legislation, of particular significance are the recent enactment of the law on the trafficking in and exploitation of women and children, and the recent amendment of the citizenship law, granting Cypriot women equal rights regarding the citizenship of their children. I am, therefore, very pleased to announce that Cyprus is now ready to withdraw its single reservation to article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and will be informing the depository of the Convention shortly.

The participation of women in politics has been another priority area in recent years. Emphasis has been given to the organization of special training programmes aimed at encouraging women to enter politics and at supporting them, as well as at creating a more friendly environment for women within political parties. Other measures include the setting up of a non-party lobby group, the sensitization and mobilization of the mass media to support this cause, and the political appointment of women in highly influential posts, including those of Ombudsperson, Auditor-General and Assistant Accountant-General of the Republic.

In addition to political appointments, the presence of women at all levels of the hierarchy within the civil service has also been increased, with their participation reaching 60 per cent in the Planning Bureau, 18 per cent in the diplomatic service and 62 per cent in the Law Office of the Republic.

Violence against women has been another top-priority area. Emphasis has been placed on the development of the appropriate legal framework and on measures facilitating its implementation and enforcement. These measures include the setting up of a multisectoral advisory committee, which monitors the implementation of the law, the promotion of scientific research, the strengthening of cooperation with non-governmental organizations, the provision of support and assistance to victims of such violence and the development of an effective training programme for

members of the police and all other professionals involved in the handling of domestic violence cases.

The economic independence of women has been pursued through the improvement and expansion of childcare facilities, the promotion of equal pay and the legislative improvement of maternity protection, which now provides for 16 weeks of maternity leave, as well as for vocational guidance and training.

Cyprus, as a candidate for accession to the European Union, has been working intensively during the last few years, pursuing the necessary adaptations on laws and policies in order to comply fully with European Union standards. Some very important legal instruments are currently being prepared as part of the harmonization process, including the law on equal treatment and equal opportunities, which will provide for the creation of an enforcement mechanism.

Last but not least, let me refer to some important developments in the area of women and peace. The women of Cyprus, who have for the last 26 years experienced the tragic consequences of occupation and displacement, have been particularly sensitive to matters of human rights and peace. The women's movement has been very active all these years in protesting against the illegal occupation through mass peaceful marches and in creating a culture of peace on the island through various activities, including the promotion of bi-communal contacts aimed at exploring ways for peaceful conflict resolution.

As a result of their growing consciousness and mobilization on peace issues, the International Eco-Peace Village has recently been established, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, which supports the whole project. Through specialized training and exchange programmes, the Eco-Peace Village will play a significant role in the promotion of women's participation in the peace-building process and the creation of a culture of peace on the island and, hopefully, in the region.

The progress achieved in Cyprus towards the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action can be attributed to a great extent to the substantial work of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, which has been at the forefront of efforts to mobilize the entire Government sector and civil society on issues of gender equality.

The budget of the National Machinery, through which projects and organizations are subsidized, has been increasing considerably during the last few years. Efforts to secure additional financial and human resources and upgrade its status will be continued in order to enable it to perform effectively its future role, which goes far beyond the development of women's specific activities and extends to the inclusion of gender perspectives in all national plans and policies.

The Government of Cyprus remains strongly committed to the pursuit of further policies and programmes promoting legal and real equality between women and men. This commitment stems from the belief that bringing about gender equality is a necessity dictated by the long-term requirements of the economic and social development of our country.

The twentieth century could aptly be described as the one in which the forces for the advancement of women were set in motion. Although the gains in this endeavour have been considerable, much remains to be done. For as we strive to create a better world for future generations — one in which the human rights of all will be fully respected — we cannot but intensify our individual and collective efforts to achieve full equality between women and men. Let us work towards making the twenty-first century the one in which this noble goal is fully realized.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to remind members that the time limit for speeches during this session is seven minutes. I would like to be able to hear the statements of all the speakers.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nasly Lozano, Counsellor to the President of the Republic of Colombia.

Mrs. Lozano (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am greatly honoured to take the floor on behalf of my country at this special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

We, members of the international community, both women and men, have come together for this important session to renew and strengthen our common commitment to achieve ever-more equitable and just societies, in which men and women can aspire to lead more dignified and productive lives and gain broader

access to goods and services with equal rights and under equal conditions.

Today in Colombia, all men and women are committed to peace. President Pastrana's Administration is aware that peace means more than signing negotiated agreements. In Colombia, we all know that in order to attain peace we must ensure that human rights, gender equality and sustainable social justice prevail. We have before us the challenge of recreating the social fabric and building a just, tolerant and equitable society that will allow access to, and the full exercise of, citizenship for all the boys and girls and women and men of our nation.

For the Colombian State, this session on equality, justice and peace is extremely important. This process of reviewing the commitments undertaken in Beijing five years ago is allowing us to take a fresh look at the situation of women and girls and to reaffirm our inescapable commitment to the advancement of women and the elimination of inequalities between men and women. Cairo, Beijing, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Lima have offered us a framework for the development of our programmes.

From the moment that the Platform for Action was signed, the situation and the condition of women have made significant progress. On 31 May this year, just six days ago, our country passed the first law on affirmative action, establishing rules for the proper and effective participation of women at the decision-making levels of the various branches and bodies of the public sector. By effecting cultural changes, the educationally based law number 581 is intended to overcome inequalities in women's ability to make important decisions affecting the country. From now on, we will have a democracy that includes women's perspectives.

This law provides for the mandatory participation of women in at least 30 per cent of administrative posts in the public sector at the decision-making level in the executive, legislative and judicial branches, nationally, regionally and locally. Although the minimum of 30 per cent is not applied to administrative and judicial career posts or elected posts, the law provides for mechanisms so that the civil servant selection processes will include the same proportion of women and men in the list of candidates for each position. In the case of posts that require a list of three candidates, at least one woman should be included. The law provides for a national plan for the advancement and development of women, which will define mechanisms that will ensure the participation of women in all spheres, including the private sector.

The Government of Colombia has acknowledged that violence against women and girls in the privacy of their homes constitutes a violation of their fundamental rights and a problem of public health, and is becoming a barrier to the social and economic development of the country. In Colombia, 200 cases of family violence are recorded every day, of which 70 per cent are perpetrated against women in couple relationships. The Government has undertaken an ambitious public policy that seeks to have an impact on the causes that lead to violent responses, to ensure early detection of cases, to generate referral and cross-referral mechanisms and to provide integrated, ethical and sustained care for victims and aggressors, in particular aggressors who are minors and those committing marital violence. Through the Make Peace programme, hotlines, emergency shelters for women and their children, free health-care services and legal programmes will be established.

With this programme, we have amended the law for the prevention of ,protection against and sanctioning of domestic violence, expanding coverage to include the care of victims, giving authority to a greater number of judges and to the local authorities that work directly in the communities, in order to hear of cases of family violence, and ensure effective intervention and immediate protection measures for victims.

This law also has an educational purpose and seeks to have an impact on the cultural transformation of relationships in which power is abused and conflicts are resolved with violence as occurs every day, by men against women and by adults against boys and girls.

Another significant achievement in the area of public policies for women is the plan for equal opportunities for men and women. The plan aims to eliminate existing inequalities and to make a reality of the equality provisions contained in the Colombian Constitution and in the international agreements that the country has signed.

The strategic lines of the plan consider the most critical points in the obstacles to the full equality of women. Its main areas are institutional strengthening;

employment and generation of income; overall health, reproductive health and health security; education; housing; participation in structures of power and decision-making; violence against women; armed conflict; and women in rural areas.

The situation of internal armed conflict that our country is facing has had a profound and painful impact on the lives of all Colombian men and women. It is not only a matter of the violent and premature deaths of thousands of men and women; it is also the suffering of widows and orphans; the uprooting and uncertainty of families that are forced to abandon their villages and lands, intimidated by fear; the distress and anxiety of the families of kidnapping victims; in short, the profound and immeasurable impact that a conflict of this nature has on society.

Given the pain suffered by the Colombian people because of widespread violence, we have an unequivocal commitment to the right to life. Therefore, we firmly reject any action that would mean a threat to life, including abortion. The right to life is a supreme right enshrined in our political charter and ratified by our legislation.

War has a different impact on men and women. Men are the main victims of armed conflict, but women, the survivors of terror, have to continue raising children, take the leading role in their homes and be responsible for healing and reconstruction in the aftermath of war.

One of the most tragic consequences of conflict is the forced displacement of thousands of women, boys and girls who, stalked by fear and intimidation, are obliged to leave their homes and start new lives in conditions that offer very fragile prospects for survival. Internal displacement takes place both massively or collectively and individually. The silence of forced individual migrations makes it difficult to determine the exact dimensions of the phenomenon. The tragedy of individual displacement, in which hundreds of women and children leave their homes to seek protection in nearby villages, is one of the most difficult, as it does not cause obvious problems of public order and therefore remains unseen by society at large. This type of displacement is of unknown magnitude, and its lack of visibility impedes and hinders the State from re-establishing the migrants' violated rights.

The effects of forced displacement are devastating. Families, often the exclusive responsibility of women, have to face the challenge of generating income in environments unknown to them, in many cases without having the capacity to assume a new productive role; and sometimes there is the additional difficulty of meeting with rejection from the communities to which they go. Colombian cities are not prepared to receive masses of people coming from rural areas, and this has caused the belts of misery around the urban areas to grow.

In the area of education, health and public services, and after armed incursions, thousands of boys, girls and women are totally abandoned, because the teachers, health professionals and even the local authorities are so afraid that they decide to abandon their villages or to limit the services they offer.

There are many other challenges that Colombia has to face in order to ensure its women the full observance of their human rights, but undoubtedly the most urgent relate to public order and rising in the country. In order to overcome this situation, we require the solidarity and cooperation of the international community.

To conclude, we need to acknowledge that poverty has not diminished in Colombia. Fifty-five per cent of the people in Colombia live in poverty, and 22 per cent in extreme poverty. The fertility rates of young people between 15 and 19 years of age are increasing, despite efforts to provide adequate sexual and reproductive health services. I would like to clarify that when we refer to these services we are not including abortion; rather, we concentrate our efforts on family planning and on ensuring safe motherhood, ensuring that women have access to high-quality health services, preventing unsafe abortion and providing post-abortion counselling.

Finally, on behalf of my delegation, I should like to repeat the words of our Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, who has written that, after 15,000 years of poor male government, the time has finally come for women to take power.

The Acting President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Maitha Salem Al-Shamsi, Adviser to Her Highness, the First Lady, President of the United Arab Emirates Women's Association.

Ms. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): We sincerely congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We wish him all the best in his leadership of this session and in the achievement of its desired objectives.

I am pleased to participate today in this meeting held at this international forum to evaluate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In my capacity as a representative of the United Arab Emirates, I convey the greetings of the people of the Emirates, who have witnessed a quantitative and qualitative breakthrough in the field of human development, thanks to the wise leadership of His Highness, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the State of the United Arab Emirates, and to the outstanding care and sincere efforts of Her Highness, Mrs. Fatima bint Mubarak, First Lady of the United Arab Emirates and President of the United Arab Emirates Women's Association.

World societies have entered the new millennium with varying degrees of economic growth, technological advancement and information development. They all, however, benefit from a number of lessons learned in the past millennium and strive to achieve higher production, social coherence and cultural prosperity. These societies have dedicated all their technological, material and human potential to that end. Despite the variety and multiplicity of machinery earmarked for the achievement of this goal, the participatory machinery, as defined by the societies of the past millennium and approved by conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations — from Nairobi and Cairo to Beijing — remains in effect. Its importance has been emphasized by national and international development institutions.

Participation, especially for women, is both a means and an end. It is an end in that it validates their worth and their status as citizens and workers in the State. It is a means to enable women to obtain their economic entitlements and to activate their roles in most fields of development, as well as allowing them to compete with a view to occupying an adequate social status.

The wise leadership of the United Arab Emirates strives tirelessly to foster cooperation among various national and international development organizations while it pursues a unique approach to addressing all human societies and international instruments rationally and reasonably. On this basis, the United Arab Emirates participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and committed itself to benefiting from the concepts contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, in conformity with the specificities of our Islamic society, so as to enhance our society's capabilities and the effectiveness of our leadership and its women cadres in coping with international variables. We have demonstrated cultural flexibility and avoided conflicting cultural rigidity.

As we all know, the Beijing Conference was held to reconfirm support for the struggles of women. Unlike the two previous Conferences, it focused on practical applications and accorded priority to efforts to achieve equality, development and peace. The Conference also sought to urge the international community to realize and ensure women's enjoyment of their rights and to assist and enable them to play a productive role. It recognized the need to guarantee equal opportunities in education and health care with a view to elevating women's living standards.

The United Arab Emirates is among those countries that are keen to implement the Platform for Action. We have therefore taken a number of steps and summoned our capacities to implement the provisions of the Platform in order to enhance the status of women, guarantee their enjoyment of their social and political rights in harmony with our Islamic customs and traditions, and foster their capacity to develop in general and their productive capacities in particular. Such steps are embodied in a strategy that Her Highness, Mrs. Fatima bint Mubarak, the First Lady, drew up in order to ensure the rights of women to ownership, which is obligatory under Islamic law, which is the Constitution of the State, and to guarantee their right to employment, education, medical treatment and social and health care.

This strategic dimension has been the basis for the drafting of all our plans and programmes, translating the strategy from mere ambition to tangible reality. These plans and programmes have been implemented and followed up by myriad ministries representing the State — the Ministries of Education, Planning, Economic Affairs, Health, Employment and Social Affairs — and by a number of

non-governmental organizations, particularly women's associations.

The following facts highlight further achievements that have led to the improvement of numerous factors affecting women in the United Arab Emirates. Women's education in the Emirates has attracted much attention and is widely accepted. Several achievements have been made in this field. The State, through its development programmes, has given powerful momentum to education, while education policy is based on equal opportunities for men and women. Current statistics available on the number of boys and girls enrolled in school show an increase in the percentage of female enrolment from primary to higher education. The State is also eager to develop new educational processes and to support female cadres in the scientific and technical specializations, thus keeping abreast of world technological developments. As to higher studies, female cadres are also being encouraged in various ways to contribute further to society after graduation.

In the economic sphere, the educational preparation of women has borne fruit in their practical contributions, which are on the rise every year in the United Arab Emirates. The presence of women is being felt without discrimination in all spheres of economic activity. They occupy all professions alongside men and receive equal pay for equal work.

In the field of health, the United Arab Emirates has paid considerable attention to health services. This has been amplified in the horizontal and vertical expansion of health and rehabilitation facilities and institutions. Great strides in the evolution of diagnostic procedures have been made. Moreover, human resources in the field of therapeutic medicine have been developed qualitatively and quantitatively. Numerous programmes designed to advance women's health have also been implemented.

Women are being encouraged to complete their education and training and to prepare for the future through their involvement in women's social associations, clubs and voluntary work that contribute meaningfully to the improvement of health care and to the physical and psychological preparation of girls for motherhood through special awareness programmes on nutrition, obesity and healthy lifestyles. Awareness is further raised on the concept of reproductive health and its significance.

Many programmes seek to prepare citizens to contribute to the health sector by encouraging them to enter the nursing profession and to join in the professional and administrative preparedness in the health sector. The State of the United Arab Emirates fully appreciates the leading role being played by women in the development of health services.

A number of programmes have been implemented to offer further opportunities for women to receive education and information in science, technology and economics so as to enhance their knowledge and skills and allow them to take part in environmental decision-making. Women are being involved in the drafting of plans for managing natural and environmental resources and for following up and monitoring their implementation. This involvement includes women's participation in health and environmental control committees.

The participation of women in the enacting of environmental legislation has a direct impact on the health and prosperity of women and their families.

Women in the United Arab Emirates have always been very active in the mass media — sharing their views and discussing all kinds of topics.

The wise leadership of the United Arab Emirates and the officials in charge of the relevant programmes and plans are fully mindful of the fact that despite these achievements, a number of objectives must still be realized and a number of steps taken. There is also vast potential to be explored in order to enable humankind, and women in particular, to progress along the path to development and cope with the technological, economic and social dimensions of the process.

On that basis, the major factors that will help us achieve these goals and carry out these measures all emanate from the specific characteristics of United Arab Emirates society, its Islamic civilization and its cultural values, which call for cooperation with international organizations in a spirit of openness, not rigidity. This same spirit of openness characterizes our dealings with all societies and civilizations, allowing us to benefit from each other's experiences, exchange views, cooperate with one another, rid ourselves of conflicts and divisions and work to bring about a world where love and peace prevail.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mrs. Elisenda Vives, Chief of the Cabinet of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Andorra.

Mrs. Vives (Andorra) *(spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation)*: Our presence at this special session of the United Nations is proof that the Principality of Andorra is giving special attention to the status of women worldwide. Andorra's concern has led it to follow up, with the means at its disposal, on all aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Andorra's joining the United Nations gave us the opportunity to belong to this forum, in which all States have a say. Despite our small size, we have a responsibility to act with solidarity, provide support and make every effort to achieve the goals of peace, freedom and full respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This responsibility has been enshrined in the Constitution of Andorra. It affirms that all persons are equal before the law. No one may be discriminated against on account of nationality, race, sex, origin, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition. It states that the public authorities must create conditions in which individuals enjoy true equality and freedom.

Respect for human rights is a right and a reality in Andorra. However, we still have a long way to go before we achieve true equality between men and women. The first step forward is to become aware of the situation and accept this fact.

Since 1993, when Andorra adopted its Constitution and became a Member of the United Nations, a major legislative effort has been under way, and the signing of various international conventions has been complemented by internal legislation. Work is continuing on the adoption of other texts, among them the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This year we will be presenting our first report on the situation of women, as provided for by this Convention.

The signing of these conventions has led to our doing a great deal of groundwork and internal reflection, prompting us to assess the situation in our country.

In recent decades we have seen a continuing transformation and constant progress in the status of women. Mrs. Angela E.V. King said in one of her statements that surely the most peaceful social revolution of the twentieth century was the transformation of the status of women. This assertion is borne out by the change in the status of women in Andorra, who have gone, in the second half of this century, from living in a mountainous rural society, where they had a traditional role, to a modern society of wage earners in which it is estimated that 62 per cent of women have a job.

With regard to activity sectors, Andorra is no exception to the situation in Western Europe as a whole. The presence of women in sectors which have been traditionally considered "tough", such as in the primary sector, the building industry and garages, for instance, is minimal, whereas they have a strong presence in professions related to health care, administration or teaching. In the Andorran workplace, inequalities between the sexes are still visible. In general, women do work that requires fewer qualifications, and decision-making in business is mainly done by men. The gap between the average wages of men and women is 32 per cent in favour of men, despite the fact that legal provisions are very clear on questions of remuneration, since they forbid any type of discrimination account of a worker's gender.

The public authorities have adopted two provisions with a view to improving the status of working women: it is forbidden to fire pregnant women without notice, and maternity leave can be shared between both parents.

Efforts are also being made in Andorra to raise awareness, through the media, of the fact that any discriminatory or harassing act in the workplace is reprehensible. The Labour Inspection service is equipping itself to see that current labour regulations are complied with and will provide full information and advice to anyone making a request in this respect.

A network of ancillary support services — holiday camps, leisure centres, and so on — financed mainly by the public authorities enable women working outside the home to combine more effectively their duties in regard to family and work. However, the economic structure of the country makes this difficult. A good part of Andorra's population is employed in the retail and hotel sectors. These sectors are noted for long working hours. Days off vary week by week, and

the periods of most work tend to coincide with weekends and school holidays.

A survey carried out the by the Association of Women of Andorra, with the support of the Government of Andorra and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has shown that in our country sexist attitudes to women are changing. Such behaviour is no longer determined by gender but by age. The age group that has the most prejudices is that of people between 45 and 65 years of age.

This change of attitude towards the role of women in society is partially the result of the general access to education. More than 56 per cent of the country's university students are women, and although they are mainly found in the education, health and human and social sciences fields, the percentage of women in technical and scientific areas is constantly increasing.

The Department of Education sees to it that everyone has access to absolutely free schooling from age 3 to age 16, without discrimination. Another important point is that students participate in educational programmes for peace and tolerance carried out in coordination with UNESCO and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) programmes.

Teachers receive ongoing training, which enables them to deepen their knowledge of their particular subject of expertise and to acquire personal techniques that enable them to teach actively in a way that respects the principles of diversity. At the same time, action is being taken to inculcate non-sexist language and eliminate sexist attitudes in children's play activities.

Another axis of the policy to fight against discrimination against women is improvement of their health. In this regard, actions carried out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare are fully integrated into the strategic goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. In January this year a survey on sex inequalities in health determinants, health and the use of health services was published. The main conclusions of this analysis are the following: the proportion of women in general bad health is slightly higher than that of men, and this difference increases in cases of chronic disease; t state of mental health is worse and vitality is lower in women, particularly if they are living with small children; and women are less inclined than men to drink alcohol and to smoke, but they are also less active in sports.

The percentage of women seeking consultation on gynaecological preventive practices is very high; information and awareness-raising campaigns take place annually aimed at increasing and consolidating these habits. The Ministry also has concrete programmes to care for future mothers and children and a youth consultancy scheme aimed at avoidance of adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

A point of great concern for the Government of Andorra is violence against women. In recent years, Andorra has not escaped the general European trend, and reported cases of violence have increased considerably, although the levels are lower than those recorded in neighbouring countries. The quest for solutions for this serious problem is a matter of intense concern for Andorran society as a whole. The nature of Andorran society, which is distributed over a territory of 464 square kilometres where practically everyone knows everyone else, makes it difficult to find an appropriate solution that will not marginalize battered women and will at the same time guarantee their safety.

The Government has set up a working group that includes representatives from the Ministry of Health, the police, the public prosecutor's office and other interested groups to study the causes and consequences of violence against women and to propose preventive measures and effective action. One result of this work has been the drafting of a protocol of coordination for combating violence against women.

In conclusion, I would request that we all be able to work together so that women everywhere in the world may find their proper place, as only a society that is fair to all its members can aspire to a future of progress.

We are particularly sensitive to the situation of girls in many developing countries and insist here that concrete action should be sought, to which we will add our own effort.

Andorran women acquired the right to vote in 1970 and the right to be elected in 1973. Since then our presence in political life has progressively increased.

Over the past 30 years five world forums on women's issues have been convened. They have given us new impetus to move forward, but they have also

revealed new obstacles with regard to women's issues. From the perspective of our own reality, we are aware of the enormous challenge we must face, and we are convinced that the twenty-first century must be the century in which the joint work of women and men all over the world will lead society to the values of justice, solidarity and equality.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on Ms. Sheila Roseau, Director for Gender Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda.

Ms. Roseau (Antigua and Barbuda): It is with a deep sense of honour and privilege that I address this gathering on the occasion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation, to extend to the President and to the other members of the Bureau the congratulations of my Government.

It seems not long ago that we gathered in Beijing to participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Beijing Conference and the resulting Platform for Action indicated the commitment of the international community to the goals of gender equality and development. In the process of consensus-building, Governments and civil society formed partnerships to further the global agenda for gender equity. Five years later, we are gathered here to review our achievements, identify obstacles and decide on the way forward.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda made a commitment to carry out the Platform for Action and has made great progress in implementing the recommendations. On the basis of our recognition that a strengthened national machinery for women, with a clear policy role, is essential to the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Directorate of Women's Affairs was renamed the Directorate of Gender Affairs, and was restructured and upgraded. This emphasis on institutional strengthening forms one component of the Government's efforts to mainstream gender in all Government sectors. In this regard, a national plan of action on gender and development is being developed with the involvement of all Government agencies. This plan emphasizes cross-sectoral responsibility for gender-sensitive policy formulation.

In consultation with civil society organizations, five critical areas were prioritized for Antigua and Barbuda. These are poverty, education, health, violence against women and women in decision-making.

The prevention, elimination and punishment of violence against women continues to be a major area of concern. Law reform has been one of the primary responses undertaken by Government since Beijing. The Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1995, which increases the penalty for rape and sexual assault. It also addresses the issue of incest. The Domestic Violence Summary Proceedings Act was passed in 1999. This important legislation guarantees women access to the legal system for the purpose of obtaining quick and affordable protective relief from all types of abuse in the home.

Understanding that substantive changes in the law must be accompanied by cultural and attitudinal change as well as services for victims, several programmes have been initiated, including free legal assistance, a 24-hour crisis hotline, a victims support group, advice counselling and a court advocacy service. Training and education programmes are targeted for health professionals, law enforcement personnel and other officials. Significantly, Antigua and Barbuda signed the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women in November 1998.

My Government's commitment to the international human rights system can also be discerned by its presentation of its combined first, second and third periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1997. The Government is now actively engaged in reviewing the Optional Protocol with a view to advancing its ratification processes.

In essence, the political will and commitment to gender equality on our part cannot be questioned. However, while this progress has been noteworthy, we are continually faced with many competing demands for our limited development capital and resources. This resource insufficiency hampers institutional capacity-building, as well as the effective and full implementation of those areas of critical concern. This challenge is shared by many small island developing States, and we call on this Conference to address this issue.

Since Beijing, the terrain of operations has changed. One word captures the essence of the radical changes — globalization. Fuelling this revolution are the rapid information technology and computer advances. In the millennium report, the Secretary-General pointed out that most developing countries have not been able to benefit from the globalization processes in an even and equitable manner.

We wish therefore to endorse General Assembly resolution 54/231 of 22 December 1999, which urges the international community to adopt policies that promote equity in finance, trade and transfer of technology and address the problems of developing countries in the areas of external debt and transfer of resources, financial vulnerability, declining terms of trade and market access.

As a small island State, Antigua and Barbuda has unfortunately been hit by five hurricanes since Beijing. Assessment of damage shows that, because of their multiple family roles, women suffer disproportionately from such natural disasters. My country, within its limited means, has tried on each occasion to mitigate the effects on our women. We look to the international community to assist vulnerable States such as ours in meeting the objectives of development, peace and equality.

All that said, it is essential that an important factor be brought to the fore. Women's entitlement to the enjoyment of all human rights and to advance themselves within the matrix of society should be unquestioned. Throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, women have contributed more than their share with regard to the labour movement and in the process towards decolonization. In many instances, they provided the background for the struggle; and in Antigua and Barbuda, in 1917, they faced the advance of mounted police while the men were in the background. Yet, then as now, women's involvement in the political process, as voters, campaigners and supporters, has not been translated into significant and proportionate representation at the highest levels of political decision-making. Women have a right to be full partners in governance, and this is a necessary component of the political, economic and social development of our society. We still therefore need to meet the challenge of creating that enabling environment in which women will have the resources and the support from both the family and the community to engage in political decision-making in our country. It is our right and we demand it.

This is a historic opportunity for us to move ahead. We therefore look forward to the adoption of further initiatives and programmes to advance the goals of gender equality and development. We look forward to action at the national and the international levels. Civil society organizations have proven themselves to be reliable agents in the advancement of the agenda for gender equality. We hope this session will expand the areas of cooperation among Governments, civil society and the international agencies.

Antigua and Barbuda recognizes and appreciates the important role of international development cooperation in support of our efforts to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the Platform for Action. In this regard, we wish to acknowledge the contribution of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and both the Caribbean Community and Commonwealth secretariats, the latter particularly for its assistance to the gender mainstreaming efforts of the national machinery.

My Government looks forward to the adoption at the end of this special session of an outcome with clearly identified actions designed to advance further our implementation of the Platform for Action. The full and equal participation of women in all spheres of civil, economic and political life as well as the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women are essential for achieving sustainable development that addresses the needs of all members of society. Our moral commitment to the women of the world demands that we all work creatively, persistently, persuasively and effectively towards achieving the goals of equality, development and peace.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.